

# THE SUSTAINABLE FINANCING INITIATIVE IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

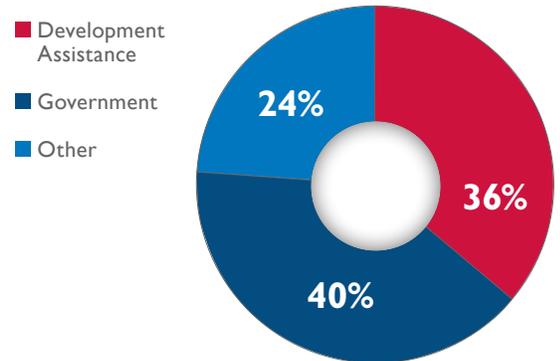
Funded by the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Sustainable Financing Initiative for HIV/AIDS (SFI) aims to increase the sustainability of the HIV response by promoting shared financial responsibility with host country governments. Since 2014, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has implemented SFI in 16 countries and two regional programs, with a budget of nearly \$48 million.

The Dominican Republic has the second highest number of people living with HIV (PLHIV) in the Caribbean. In 2020, there were an estimated 70,000 PLHIV among persons ages 15 to 49 years, accounting for 0.9 percent of the population in this age group. The same year, close to 2,000 people were predicted to be newly infected with HIV and 700 to die from an AIDS-related illness.<sup>1</sup> The Government of the Dominican Republic plays a major role in financing the national response by fully funding antiretrovirals (ARVs) and other HIV commodities, but more investment is needed from both the public and private sectors to ensure sustainable funding for the HIV response over the long term.

In collaboration with the Government of the Dominican Republic, SFI activities focused on mobilizing domestic resources, strengthening human resources, expanding access to HIV services in the private sector, and providing technical assistance to integrate financing, procurement, and distribution of ARVs through the country's social health insurance program.

## AT A GLANCE

HIV / AIDS Response Funding Sources in 2017<sup>2</sup>  
**Dominican Republic total:  
\$70 million**



The evaluation team, composed of HFG, CDC, USAID, and SAI staff, completes the assessment questionnaire at a comprehensive care center (SAI)



PHOTO: WENDY TACTUK, COURTESY OF CAPACITY PLUS AND INTRAHEALTH INTERNATIONAL

## How SFI Contributes to a Sustainable HIV Response



SFI supported **non-governmental organizations'** participation in the national health insurance scheme as a way to make the HIV response more financially sustainable.



SFI advocated for the **inclusion of antiretrovirals in insurance** benefits packages through advocacy and community outreach to clients and health clinics.



SFI strengthened the capacities of health workers to **increase health insurance enrollment** for PLHIV.

<sup>1</sup> PEPFAR (2020). Dominican Republic Country Operational Plan COP 2020. Strategic Direction Summary. April 1, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) (2020). Financing Global Health Visualization. Seattle, WA: IHME, University of Washington.

BETWEEN 2017 AND 2020, SFI IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC WORKED TO STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO ENSURE PLHIV GET THE HIV CARE AND SERVICES THEY NEED. AS A RESULT OF THIS INITIATIVE, SFI IMPROVED THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE RESPONSE BY INCREASING SERVICE COVERAGE WHILE LEVERAGING DOMESTIC RESOURCES TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF PLHIV.

## Public Financial Management

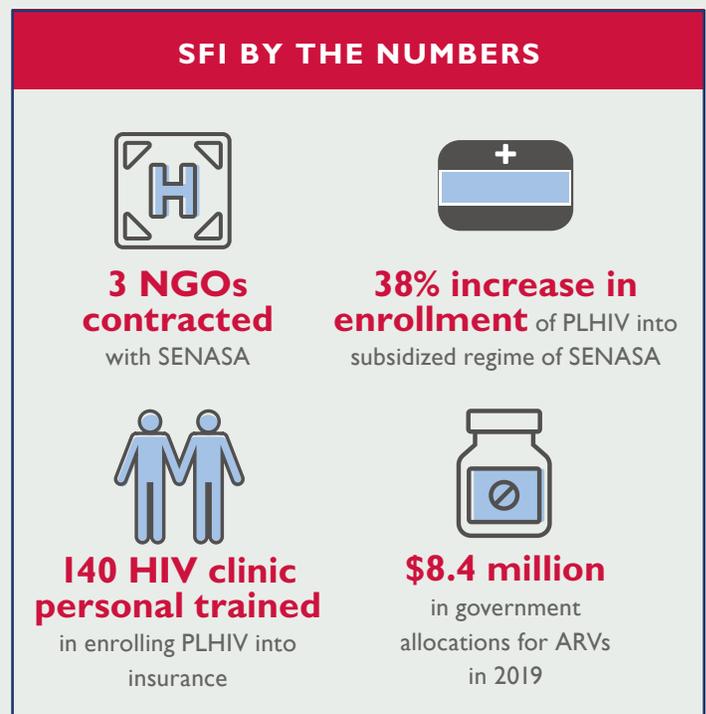
Adherence to antiretroviral treatment (ART) and other essential HIV medicines allows PLHIV to live with little to no risk of transmitting HIV and to live healthier lives. Since 2015, the Dominican Republic's Ministry of Health has funded ARVs through its annual budget process. Transitioning this responsibility to the national health insurance program both guarantees long-term financing for ARVs from insurance premiums and results in cost savings through more efficient procurement. To ensure PLHIV can access the services they need, SFI supported the **generation of evidence and advocacy efforts to ensure continued funding for the HIV response. This work contributed to the increase in government contributions for ARVs by \$8.4 million in 2019.** SFI also promoted the inclusion of ARVs in family health insurance benefit packages. This change saves the government an estimated \$163,000 annually through more efficient procurement.

## Private Sector Engagement & Financial Protection

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Dominican Republic are major contributors to HIV service provision, particularly for key and vulnerable populations. With donor funding declining, **SFI worked to strengthen NGOs' financial prospects to support the sustainability of the HIV response.** Formalizing NGO engagement with the National Health Insurance (Seguro Nacional de Salud, or SENASA, in Spanish) means that participating NGOs receive payments for services rendered to registered PLHIV. To date, the health insurance program has reimbursed NGOs \$25,000 for providing HIV services.

After analyzing how SENASA operates, SFI sought to clarify expectations and smooth out how the NGOs work to meet the national health insurance program requirements. To that end, **SFI worked with government bodies and NGOs to formalize NGO responsibilities for PLHIV enrollment.** It did this by building the capacities of NGO staff, providing technical assistance, and facilitating peer learning to improve NGO performance and ensure they followed SENASA procedures.

The ripple effect of SFI's work was significant. **SFI trained 140 staff at HIV clinics** across the country to enroll people in the national health insurance program, thereby increasing access for PLHIV to the services they need. In only four months between April and August 2018, **SENASA enrolled 7,644 PLHIV**, a 38 percent increase, in the subsidized regime. SFI also supported the development of informational brochures on the benefits of enrolling in the subsidized plan that were distributed around the country.



As a result of SFI's efforts, three NGOs serving more than 9,000 PLHIV are now working with SENASA. With continued support from SFI, these NGOs are currently working on scaling up to offer additional reimbursable services such as primary care and dermatology, to earn more revenue in order to cross-subsidize HIV services. Many other NGOs also benefited from learning what it takes to obtain a SENASA contract, while others are also exploring working with the national health insurance program.

## SUMMARY

SFI showcases how helping NGOs partner with the national health insurance system decreases donor dependence for NGOs and expands affordable access to care for PLHIV. While the initial results look promising, efforts are still needed to secure sustainable financing for the Dominican Republic's HIV response into the future.